

**2012 WESTERN OPEN**  
**LOVELOCK NEVADA**  
*FLOWN 6-10-12*

***Getting Started:***

My infatuation with pigeons has been lifelong. Both of my parents came from successful farm families. My father is Dutch and he and many of his relatives always loved having top quality livestock. They took pride in breeding from animals with best genetics possible and then keeping the animals in top health and condition. My grandmother maiden name was de Boer which in Dutch translates into "the farmer". So I guess my love of pigeons is in my DNA. My first pigeons were obtained when my sweet Aunt and Uncle climbed up the ladder of an old, very tall grain elevator and took two Blue Bars out of the nest. One of these two wild pigeons became so tame that she would land on our shoulders when we were outdoors. Occasionally as kids we would let her follow us into the house where upon on occasion she laid an egg underneath my sisters bed!. At that time we knew "George" should have been Georgeanna or something more feminine. I had a coop full of Barn pigeons until I was a teenager and asked for some fancy pigeons for Christmas. Santa graciously came through even though I probably was more deserving of coal! I raised fancy pigeons until I was a senior in high school. I had always dreamed of racing pigeons and in high school I was able to join the SRV racing pigeon club. I flew one young bird season with little success on the race sheet, but, thoroughly enjoyed seeing the birds come home. After a 2 year break to serve a church mission I got back into pigeon racing.

***Strains I prefer:***

I prefer a strain of pigeons that can win. But I especially like pigeons that come out front frequently! It seems to me that we Americans (me included) as a general rule get too concerned with "pure" or strains. The Europeans seem to be less concerned with strains and more likely to focus on performance. Undoubtedly there are many famous strains in Europe. Most of these strains come from the crossing of two or more families, then breeding from the champion flyers. Then adding offspring from other top performance stock. From what I can surmise many of the best European flyers trade offspring from their champion racers among each other. As a result many seem to remain top performers. A high ratio of the winners seem to be hybrids. After observing this we have tried to imitate the best American and European flyers. Our middle distance pigeons of the past decade have primarily been Janssens crossed with Van Loons. These families have produced a high ratio of good/great performers. It is important that you have pigeons that produce a high percentage of pigeons that fly well. Stay away from pigeons that produce a low ratio of good ones. They are a waste of time and money. We have been very impressed with the success of Gaby Vandabeele and others in Europe and as a result have attempted to bring a nice nucleus of Vandabeele's and a few other successful strains. We also have had success with the Kloecks, Hees etc. We give all breeders 2 years to breed top racers. The pigeons which do, stay. All the others are eliminated, regardless of strain or name. If you want to be at the top of the race sheet on race day it is an epic mistake to waste time on pigeons because they have a great pedigree or are beautiful etc.

Several distance families have come and gone in our loft. One family has proven to repeatedly produce the goods, they are a family of Gordons. They are especially good at the distance on hot, tough days. We are currently trying a family of Tourniers for the distance. They look promising. We will have more of an idea of their worth after next year. It is our recommendation that you find pigeons that fly good under your race course conditions and your method of handling/flying. As a general rule good pigeons fly well on most courses, but there are exceptions, and much depends on your flying system.

Some families fly better on widowhood or double widowhood while others might fly better on the natural method.

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***Feeding Methods:***

We are always trying to improve our feeding of the race birds. We currently use Wheatland Feeds Racing mixture with probiotics as our base mix. The only complaint we have had in the past was that we felt this mix had too many peas. Peas and racing don't seem to be mix. Wheatland recently slightly changed the mixture and cut down on the peas. A great mix improved.

Our feeding method is as follows: On Saturday after the birds return from the race we feed our breeding mixture, which consists of Wheatlands Breeding Mix with probiotics, chicken layer pellets and, game bird grower pellets, extra safflower, barley and grit. We feed a liberal amount, enough to allow all the racers to eat all they want. We want them to get all the nutrients needed to rebuild their bodies as quickly as possible after the stress of the race. By Sunday afternoon all that is generally left after a normal race are a few pellets and barley. We then feed a light mixture of barley and safflower Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday morning. Our objective is to keep the weight off the birds. Wednesday afternoon we feed our performance mix, which consists of Wheatlands Race mix with probiotics, extra safflower, peanuts etc. We might add more peanuts and other small seeds depending upon the distance and perceived race day conditions. It is our feeling that on races over 250 miles that feeding the birds extra feed heavy is a good idea. Under fed birds have a tendency to be lost or physically hurt when race conditions are tougher than anticipated.

***Training:***

We like to start training about a month before the racing season begins. We do not get overly excited to win the early short races. We want to be competitive from the first race to the last, but our goal is to reach peak form later in the season when our favorite races of the year occur. We enjoy the 300-500 mile races the most. After the races start we generally do not take the birds road training. The only exception is if the bird are a little out of shape and we feel they need a little extra work to be competitive. Otherwise they just are exercised around the loft. As the mileage of the races increases the birds naturally become more physically fit. We are more inclined to push the hens earlier in the season and allow the cocks to naturally come into shape so they are rested and ready to offer a peak performance on the longer races. Ten or more weekends of racing is physically and mentally demanding on the birds and achieving and retaining form with the team is often easier said than done.

***Supplements/additives and medications used:***

We are always looking for good supplements and additives to boost performance and promote form. At the current time we are using an amino acid/vitamin supplement once per week. (There are several good brands). We tried Ganus' grit/vitamin supplement this past year and it seems to be effective. Good grit is also critical. We mix it into our feed so they get fresh grit daily. We also find that electrolytes are very helpful. Especially in hot weather or after physically exhausting races. Medications are a double edged sword. We try to medicate only as needed. But we are always terrified that the birds will become infected by sick birds in the race crates or some other way. So we probabally have a tendency to over medicate. We use a 4 in 1 medication for respiratory infection, canker worms and cocci.

***The winning birds heritage:***

Our winning bird is a three year old cock. Now named "The Lovelock Cock". The one thing that stood out to me about him this spring is that he just seemed to glow with good health. He just seemed healthier than any other pigeon in the loft. Why, I'm not sure. Was his box in a super ventilated area? Was he crazy about his mate this year? He was fed and medicated the same as the other pigeons, I guess he was just physically mature. For the last the last 5 weeks of the season he was so healthy he just looked radioactive! He flew well. He was 3rd on a little bit tough 160 mile race and then on the next weekend he won the combine 500. After two tune up short races for the following 2 weeks we sent him to the Western Open. from Lovelock, Nevada.. 408 miles to our loft. He was really motivated and healthy. Add a nice tail wind to the mix and it made for a winning formula, I guess.

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One of my mentors is the late Art Hees. He gave me some excellent advice that has really helped me in my breeding and racing exploits. He said of breeding "Try to have have a winner on every line of the pedigree". Great advice that I have tried to follow. The "Lovelock Cock's" sire is off my foundation pair of Gordons. He was 2nd on a smash 600 miler and was the combine champion long distance old bird. His dam as a young bird won a 350 mile race and is a Janssen/Vanloon cross. She goes back to Ken Christopher's famous "Campbell" who won from 100-600 miles.

#### ***Club and Combine info:***

We fly in the Snake River valley club which has been in existence for over 50 years. Our membership fluctuates. The sluggish economy has certainly taken its toll on membership here. We have had as many as 18 lofts competing and as few as 5. We fly with the club out of Pocatello and add the BMT club out of the Bozeman, Montana for combine races. Our club focuses on having at least 2 races per weekend. Our goal is to offer a race each weekend that every flyer and pigeon can participate in. When the season starts we have two releases and after we reach the 300 mile station or beyond, we always have a short release from 200 miles or shorter. This system allows the new guys and sprint guys to fly each weekend and also offers the more established guys a race to tune up their older pigeons for a distance race. Our combine driver meets the Beaver/St. George Utah clubs at 200 miles and we send our pigeons with them for our longer releases and we take their pigeons back to release their longer races. It takes some effort to keep everything coordinated and attempt to keep the participants happy. (A difficult task at times!) It is a great system that saves money and is mutually beneficial for both groups.

#### ***Summary:***

In closing I would like to thank those who make the Western Open series of races a success and would like to encourage all clubs/combines in the west to set up their race schedule to participate. Thanks to the Digest for promoting the Western Open races. Gene does a great job of giving all of the distance sections some publicity which is very beneficial to the sport. Congratulations are in order to all Section winners for a job well done!